Jake and the rest of the Baumlieber family were out for a walk on a nice autumn day through the woods at their summer home. This included Jake’s mom and dad and his older sister, Olivia. This preserve is dominated by Oak trees. They hadn’t gone very far when they started to see acorns littering the ground. Always the curious one, Jake ran around and gathered up a handful of acorns.

“What are these, Daddy?” he asked.

Before his dad could answer, Olivia chimed in, “those are acorns, silly. Everybody knows that!”

“Acorns?” questioned Jake. “Daddy, is she fibbing? Those don’t look like any corn we’ve ever had.”

“No Jake. Not corn, acorns.” His father replied. “Acorns are the seeds that come from Oak trees. Most of the trees in this area are Oak trees.”

“What are the acorns for?” asked Jake.

“They are for making more Oak trees. That acorn will grow into a great, big Oak if everything goes right.”

“How does that little thing…acorn…turn into a great big Oak. Now, you’re fibbing me.”

Jake has a habit of thinking everyone is lying to him if they tell him something he doesn’t understand. So his dad tried to explain it to him.

“All the information on how to make another Oak tree is in those acorns. Plus, some energy to help the new tree get started.”

“In that small thing?” said Jake. “I don’t believe you.”

“I know it’s hard to believe, but think of that acorn like a Lego™ kit we buy at the store. All the pieces and the instructions to make that toy are in the small box.”

“Those must be magic acorns!” Jake exclaimed.
“You are the silliest boy ever!” said Olivia. “Those aren’t magic, just regular acorns!”

“Okay Olivia”, Jake’s mom scolded, “Be nice to your brother.”

“In a way Jake, “his dad continued, “all seeds are magic. They all have what it takes to make another tree.”

“So all of the acorns that fall from the tree become other trees?”

“No, Jake. If that happened there would be too many trees in one area. A lot of the acorns get eaten by animals. More than 100 kinds of animals in the U.S eat acorns; deer, squirrels, mice, rabbits, raccoons, and lots of other animals eat acorns. Birds including wild turkey, ducks, woodpeckers and crows also eat acorns.”

Jake thought for a minute and then asked, “What about when squirrels bury the acorns in the ground? Do they do that to save them to eat later?”

“Well yes. That’s the idea. Only they forget where they put most of them. A lot of those acorns turn into little trees. You might say the squirrels plant Oak trees.”

“Are animals the only ones who eat acorns?” Jake asked. “Do people eat them?”

“Yes, Jake. Some people do eat acorns but mostly the animals eat them.” Mr. Baumlieber replied.

“So is that why there are so many Oak trees, daddy? To make food for the animals?”

“That’s only one of the uses that Oak trees have. There are many kinds of animals that need Oak trees for other reasons. A lot of birds make their nests in Oak trees because the leaves are big and cover them up so other animals don’t know they are there.

Otherwise, the eggs and baby birds might get eaten. Remember seeing the squirrel nests in the trees? They use Oak leaves to build their nests just like lots of birds do.”
“Don’t forget honey,” Mrs. Baumlieber added, “there are animals that live in the hollow spots in Oak trees. Especially when it gets cold.”

“Right dear,” said Jake’s dad, “an Oak woodland like this one can support up to 350 different kinds of life. That is, when you add up all the insects, spiders and other things that are so small we can’t even see them. Even when a tree dies there are creatures and fungus that live off the wood as it decomposes.”

“Gee, daddy.” Said Jake, displaying all the acorns he had collected, “I’m going to take these and plant them in our back yard. Maybe then all those animals will come and live at our other house.”

“Well Jake”, replied his father, “I don’t think we have enough room in our back yard for an Oak forest.

But you go ahead and try if you want.”

And so he did!